And though it cannot be denied that much that is pernicious may accompany what is good, yet upon the whole it must be desirable that knowledge and enlightenment should be subject to few, if any restraints; that it should be free as the air, and liberal as the sunlight, the inheritance alike of the peasant and the prince.

In the world of science, too, what gigantic changes have been effected; how astounding the results which we have lived to witness, results which, had they been promulgated in the ears of the generation which has preceded us, would have sounded like the ravings of enthusiasm, or the wild wanderings of transcendant folly! Effects and results so amazing that time and space seem to have been annihilated, and the very elements brought into subjection to the powers of man.

In our commercial and manufacturing relations also how great have been the improvements! No cramped or stinted measures of national intercourse will suffice us now; no crippled or precarious exchanges of national produce will meet our extended views—but the kingdoms of the world, as with one mighty consent, have opened their tide gates and their harbours, and give and take the fruits of their soil, or the produce of their native skill, with an earnestness and cordiality altogether unknown to former times. So that it has come to pass, that yielding either to the sword of our conquering armies, the enterprising spirit of our navigators, or to the efforts of our Christian missionaries, there is scarcely a nation under heaven that is not open to the industry of our traders and mechanics, or that does not present a fair field for the exercise of physical and mental skill.

It is no cause of surprise then that, amidst this universal excitement, this panting after improvement, the department of the *fine arts*, the subject in which we are more especially interested, should have engrossed its share of public attention, and called forth the active energies of those who are engaged in it as a profession, or who are otherwise interested in the promotion of its welfare. Accordingly we find that throughout the length and breadth of intelligent Europe, except so far as recent events have interfered, a great and important movement has been going forward. The feeling and interest for art, which floated only on the *surface* of society, has penetrated its depths, leavening the whole mass of the community, and giving hopes that the present age will be second to none in the history of our race, for the height of excellence to which art may attain. Look where we will, we find abundant proof of the existence of this newly-awakened interest in art. In Prussia and Bavaria, in France and Belgium, through the many states of Germany, the greatest efforts have been making to elevate the character of the productions of their artists, and to give art a special protection. Our brethren across the Atlantic, too, seem to have awakened to a sense of the importance of cultivating a taste for the fine arts; half civilised Russia is coming up with hasty strides, and even the inhabitants of the distant homes of Australia, are beginning to seek pleasure and instruction in the contemplation of such works of art as it lies in their power to collect together. Such are some of the indications of the deep interest that is universally felt for the welfare of art in the present day. And if it be asked what part our own country has taken in the general effort to rescue the arts from the obscurity into which they had sunk, we are compelled to acknowledge that she has been among the last to extend a helping hand to the struggling sons of genius, and that she has been the most tardy and indifferent in coming to the rescue; so that up to the present time the conviction of all candid inquirers into the condition of the arts in this country has been, "that from the highest branches of poetic design, to the lowest connection between design and manufactures, they have received but little encouragement. The want of instruction in design among the industrial classes, the absence of public and freely opened galleries of art," and the general difficulty of gaining access to works of excellence, have all combined strongly to impress the feeling, that England has been behind in the race with other countries.

At length, however, a change has taken place: and in various ways, the Government on the one hand, and the people on the other, are endeavouring to gather the dying embers together, to rekindle the expiring light of genius, and to fan the fire of art into a flame that may be seen and acknowledged by all surrounding nations.

Such are the manifestations of the great movement in favour of art in our own country.—a movement, the nature of which it is well worth our while to consider and examine, that we may discover, if possible, whether our expectations of great achievements in art are based upon a safe foundation, or whether we are erecting a superstructure without a basis, which the first political revolution or national calamity might bring to the ground. In order to do this we must take a general survey of the history of art; we must cull the beautiful flower, and trace by its seed the climate where it flourished best; we must open each leaf, and endeavour to find under whose care it blossomed, and in what garden it sprung. We must trace the silver thread of art as it is interwoven in the web of Europe's history, or I might rather say, we must trace the *stream of art* as it winds its tortuous way through the last few centuries of the history of mankind. And a deeply interesting inquiry it is, whether we make it for its own sake, or as it is closely allied with the progress of civilization. At one time we find it a little streamlet wending its way unnoticed, unobserved in obscurity and neglect, and at other times swelling out into the majestic river, bearing on its tranquil breast the sublime conceptions of some of the greatest minds that have ever shed a lustre on humanity; or, to dispense with the metaphor, at some periods of its history we find it pursued with religious devotedness by humble monks in the solitude of their cloisters, and at other times practised and professed by the friends and favourites of emperors, who basked in the sunshine of royalty, before whom princes stood uncovered, and in whose train of followers were the great ones of the earth.

Through such changes we track the stream of modern art up to its humble and apparently inadequate sources, to the days when Pietro Pisano, the sculptor, Cimabue, and, above all, the lowly shepherd-boy Giotto, inspired by the love of truth, and contrasting their own beautiful perceptions of nature with the dry formalities which had for so long characterized the Byzantine school, were impelled to throw the whole strength of their original minds into the work, and thus gave the first impulsive movement to what we call "modern art."

When Italy was overwhelmed by the bold and barbarous nations of the north, the arts fled for refuge to the classic shores of Greece; when Greece was overrun by the Mahometans, the arts returned to Italy, and there maintained a power and acquired a footing almost permanent, so that, in making an examination of the progress and development of art in Italy, we may gain a comprehensive idea of what real excellence in art has ever been.

In reviewing its history, from the middle of the 13th century to the period of its greatest glory, we meet with many deeply interesting and important facts, with much that deserves the exercise of the highest faculties of the mind, and with men of the loftiest genius and most exalted intellect. But amongst them all, art was indebted to none so much as to Giotto, whose mind, no doubt, was peculiarly fitted for the direction it took under the guidance of Cimabue, by that love of nature with which he was imbued, while tending his flocks in the valleys of Tuscany; for we find, that from the very commencement of his career "he not only deviated from the practice of the older painters, but stood opposed to them. He not only improved—he changed;" he took up a position altogether new. And let us mark, in passing, an important principle that is involved in the consideration of his character, namely, that it was by the close and constant study of nature, that he achieved that distinct separation of modern art from the lifeless system that had prevailed for ages before him; it was from the constant study of *nature* that he acquired the power by which he gave to art a total change in its direction and character. Let us ever bear this in mind, since there are not wanting those who teach that we look too much at nature and exercise too little of the faculty of imagination. And let us remember, that true excellence in art has always ebbed and flowed in proportion as the painters of the different periods adhered to *nature*, or were content with the prescribed methods of those whom they set up as models for imitation.

Giotto, then, was the first painter who "held, as it were, the mirror up to nature;" he was the destined instrument through which art was no longer to be, as it had so long been, the mere fashioner of idols, but was to become one of the great interpreters of the human mind, with all its feelings, faculties, and sentiments, and of human life in all its variety of aspects. With him originated that revolution in art which seized at once on all imaginations and sympathies: by him a new impulse was given, new ideas were awakened,—and, as I have said, from him art derived in all that is worth the name its first progressive movement. It is to be regretted that, in this country, we possess no examples of his works to which access may be gained.

The best specimens of his works are to be found in a series of subjects from sacred history and of allegorical representations at Padua, where they adorn the chapel called by his name in the church of Sta. Giustina. These designs were executed at the time that he was living in close personal intercourse with Dante, the influence of whose spirit and genius is clearly visible in these expressive compositions. Of all the existing productions of Giotto there are none so perfect and genuine as these, or which so truly exemplify the character and beauty of his style. Time will not allow us to pause and examine any of these subjects, deeply interesting as the task would be,—for they abound in ideas then new in pictorial design, and were the first great efforts by which art appealed to the sympathies, the feelings, and the heart.

After Giotto, the stream of art flowed on, deriving its supplies, if I may so speak, from his numerous scholars and imitators, receiving fresh accessions to its fulness from the talents of Andrea Orcagna, Simoni Martini, and many others, whose names I need not enumerate in an excursive view of the subject. And here it may be desirable to give a brief account of one of the most interesting and extraordinary monuments of the middle ages, and which had a direct and important influence on the progress and development of art. I allude to the Campo Santo of Pisa; the building of which was scarcely finished when it became the arena on which the best artists of the time were summoned to try their powers. The Campo Santo was a vast burial-ground, inclosed by a beautiful gothic arcade, which was designed and built by Giovanni Pisano, about the year 1283. It was the interior of this arcade that was decorated with frescoes; a work that occupied many years: it was indeed continued at intervals through a period of two centuries; its progress having been interrupted by the political misfortunes and internal dissensions which distracted the city of Pisa. The hand of time has swept away and obliterated the earliest of these extraordinary compositions; some, however, remain, and deeply interesting they are as a series of illustrations of the progress of art during its first development. Some of the decorations were painted by Giotto, but are among those that have perished. Then came Andrea Orcagna, who was the son of a goldsmith at Florence, and who, though not immediately a pupil of Giotto, owed much of what he acquired to that life-giving influence that he had breathed through art. He was one of the many instances in which the goldsmiths of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries distinguished themselves as painters. And so the stream rolled on till towards the early part of the fifteenth century—a period which may, perhaps, be justly considered one of the most important in the history of the world: it was distinguished by great mental activity, by a rapid advance in the refinements of life, by the revival of classic learning, and by two great events, of which it has been said that the results lie beyond the reach of human calculation,—the invention of the art of printing, and the discovery of the vast continent of America.

The spirit of inquiry and progress which marked the epoch was felt no less in the world of art; there was an evident effort after originality of style, and art found its powerful representatives in such men as Ghiberti,

To learn more about PDF Compression and OCR visit ThePaperlessOffice.org